

# Conversion growth of evangelical churches in the Philippines

*February 2019, Marten Visser and Andy Smith*

## **Executive summary and recommendations**

A limited survey among thirteen ABCCOP (Alliance of Bible Christian Communities of the Philippines) churches and nine other churches was done. The yearly conversion growth rate found is 3.3%. However, there is no guarantee that this survey represents the church in the Philippines as a whole.

**Recommendation 1: A large and random survey should be done to get results with more certainty and to allow an analysis of growth patterns on a broader level. Such a survey was attempted but failed. It might be worthwhile to attempt it again.**

Churches with an ethnically (regionally) diverse membership grow faster than homogeneous churches.

**Recommendation 2: Help churches learn to serve and welcome people from different backgrounds.**

The surveyed churches have a much higher average education level than the general population. If the same is true for the evangelical church as a whole, it suggests that churches could do more or better at evangelizing less educated people.

**Recommendation 3: Plant congregations whose ways of being and doing church align better with the less educated.**

Almost all evangelicals affirm that enough faith leads to healing. This finding could indicate a pervasive influence of health and wealth teaching.

**Recommendation 4: Emphasize biblical teaching about the brokenness of the human condition and about the reality of illness this side of Jesus' return in glory.** Because of the church in the Philippines' reliance on the Bible (see below), this task should be doable.

Other important findings:

- The Bible plays a very important role in the church in the Philippines, more than in any other country researched. Bible study is mentioned as the most important experience in coming to faith for over half of all converts. The Bible is also mentioned by almost ninety percent of all respondents as the most important media in becoming Christian.
- Outreach to teenagers is very important for church growth since a third of converts come to faith while ten to nineteen years old.
- Filipino Christians are very active in evangelism. Sixty percent share the gospel every month. Their faithful witness is surely a significant factor in the rapid growth of the church in the Philippines.

## 2. Explanatory Comments

### Contributors

We are thankful for all the people who contributed to this research. We cannot name each one but will highlight those who made special contributions.

Bishop Noel Pantoja of the Philippine Council of Evangelical Churches expressed support for this research.

Russ Bauck of OC International created the list of 100 randomly selected churches.

Pastor Herbie Carmona of Church Planters League Inc. was the initial National Coordinator. His connections throughout the Philippines gave us hope that the research could be done.

Pastor Bemardo Cainong of Church Planters League Inc. served as National Coordinator for a time and contacted many people about the research.

Bishop Chito Ramos of ABCCOP invited us to explain the research to a gathering of ABCCOP leaders which made it much easier to get additional ABCCOP churches to participate in the research.

Many people accepted our request to serve as Key Contact for a given geographical area. Some of them went beyond our expectations to find and survey churches.

The leaders of twenty-two churches allowed their congregations to be surveyed. The members of those churches completed and returned the survey forms.

The office staff of one ministry provided significant practical assistance.

Dr. Anne Kwantes wrote a historical paper for this project (see the next section).

### Factors that Limited the Research

The church data in the database from which the random list was created included both old and new data. Some of the churches selected could not be found which suggests that they had moved, merged with another church, or closed.

Initially, it was very difficult to find a National Coordinator.

It was difficult to find a Key Contact for certain provinces.

Some of the churches selected were found but did not want to participate in the research.

### Use of “Protestant”

In the Philippines, *Protestant* can mean something other than it means elsewhere. So, for the question about the most important religion in the home the respondent grew up in, the survey provided Protestantism and Evangelical Christianity as separate answers. Our research focused on evangelical Christians.

### 3. Trade, Politics and Faith in the Philippines

By Anne C. Kwantes

#### Introduction

It is sometimes suggested that, when one describes history, reasons are given for growth or delay in the Christian faith. We know that trade, politics, social situations and economics always form a background for a given faith. At the same time, we Christians believe that history is linear, and that God directs lives and events toward an end.

This brief paper is an effort which, also from the Christian viewpoint, shows how events and historical situations indicate explanations which can satisfy our historical assessment of a situation.

#### A. Islam – 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries

It is believed that the first migrants arrived in the south of the Philippines around the time of BC-AD, and possibly centuries earlier when people walked along land bridges from one region to another.

After Muhammad's life (d. +/- 730 AD), Islam spread quickly and was soon found in much of South East Asia.

As Malay and Indian traders spread north and east they arrived in the southern Philippines and settled in Sulu; the islands became an entrepot in trade with people of the general region and especially of China<sup>1</sup>. Both Islam and the Chinese language and culture became part of a largely peaceful acculturation process. Marrying local women aided Muslim missionaries in the adoption of Filipino ways, while Islam gradually spread. As the south adopted Islam, trade, politics and faith spread, and by the time Spaniards reached Manila, they met Muslims who had already occupied and protected the region. These people were syncretistic Muslims, whose life and conduct were a fusion of local and imported beliefs.

#### B. Roman Catholic Christianity – 1521 to the end of Spanish resistance

When Spaniards arrived in the Philippines, they carried long-term baggage of rivalry with European Protestantism. Both Spain and Portugal were competing for eastern spices which were alluring and lucrative. In 1493, Pope Alexander VI drew a rather haphazard North-South line (rewritten in 1494 and 1529) across the Atlantic Ocean. This line divided the then-known world into two regions; Portugal was permitted to travel east of this line, Spain west. In spite of this papal line, Spain was eventually brought to the Philippines, especially when land travel was closed following the Muslim conquest of Istanbul in 1453.

Spanish explorers brought Roman Catholic priests, and the first mass was said in the Philippines in 1521. Spaniards travelled via Mexico, and thus Mexicans (*creoles*) accompanied the Spaniards. The priests' priority was evangelization, yet they spent many hours of selfless teaching of agriculture, road building, technology and education.

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<sup>1</sup> Teodoro A. Agoncillo, *A Short History of the Philippines* (New York: The New American Library, Inc., 1969), 88.

The pope gave the king of Spain royal patronage, the *Patronata Real*, thus enabling royal orders to carry out various programs of church and state. As one reads of various mission labors in the Philippines by Spanish and Mexican clergy, one cannot help but admire those who travelled to the Philippines, confident that they'd never see their families or homeland again.

Of course there were many crises. To begin, the *encomienda* system was often so abused that Governor Dasmarinas bitterly complained to the king about the bishop and the religious, while the bishop accused civil officials that they maltreated the natives so severely that they could not breathe<sup>2</sup>. Later conflicts included harsh revolts against church and clergy, and the banishment of the Jesuits from the country from 1768-1859.

Forty years following the start of work in Japan, the Portuguese mission superior Alessandro Valignano noted that no Filipinos were as yet ordained to the priesthood, while there were numerous young men in training in Japan<sup>3</sup>; apparently Spaniards had higher expectations of the Japanese while these were lower at that time for Filipinos. Yet, from the 1590s to the 1760s, Spaniards prepared a basis for the education of Spanish youth from country schools to city universities and, though onerous, Filipinos also benefited. This made for a Filipino church from which indigenous clergy finally could graduate. These efforts were consequential in later times, and when Catholicism's stats showed nearly a million Filipino converts "to the pious, this was Spain's finest moment in the Philippines"<sup>4</sup>.

Toward the end of the Spanish Roman Catholic era, there was not as much resistance to the Church as there was to Spanish rule. Dr. Jose Rizal was one of a group of Filipino leaders who was raised a Roman Catholic, but who became an anti-cleric during his young adulthood.

### **C. Protestantism – 1899 to present**

It is said that the 19th Century was the "Great Century of Missions." It is also said that this century was the "Great Century of Colonialism." This era is totally different from that of the first two sections of this paper, and must be interpreted in different ways.

Compared to the settling of the original Muslim inhabitants here, or to the Spanish forced conquest, the Protestant movement of the Americans (1899-1946) seems to have been motivated by both religion and politics. True, Filipinos often despaired of Spanish Roman Catholicism and its colonialism, but many equally despaired of American paternalism. While Spaniards believed that church and state should be united, Americans thought them separate entities. They considered public education important; the "White Man's Burden" and political dependence, just.

When Protestant missionary pioneers arrived in the Philippines, their work seemed impossible. The dearth of workers was too great, antagonism of many Filipinos clearly overwhelming even when there was opposition to American military opposition, thus cooperation among missionaries appeared necessary.

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<sup>2</sup> Agoncillo, *A Short History*, 56-57.

<sup>3</sup> Samuel H. Moffett, "The Spaniards in the Philippines (1521-1800)," in *A History of Christianity in Asia. Vol. II: 1500-1900* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005), 159-60.

<sup>4</sup> Agoncillo, *A Short History*, 42.

It seemed that comity as practiced in other areas of Christian missions would be helpful. As early as April 1901, a council called “The Evangelical Union of the Philippines,” and a denominational name of *La Iglesia Evangelica de las Islas Filipinas*<sup>5</sup> were organized; its goal was Protestant church union.

To Americans, public education may have appeared necessary; but American teachers usually did not inspire Filipino nationalism. Political dependence did not match that of a state whose leader was Dr. Jose Rizal, a Filipino. Arguments and fires for independence were bright, but it would take until 1946 when the Republic of the Philippines became independent.

## Conclusion

During American times numerous individuals and groups came to the Philippines to bring the Gospel. In 1999, several celebrations were held during the Centennial throughout the nation, and the Republic is often held up as the only Christian country in the region. It will be good to see how the Gospel has spread throughout the nation and to learn the many ways in which the Christian faith is expressed.

While eras changed, regional culture and local individual opinions remained. Still, one sees personal and national developments change throughout time and country. Urbanization and public justice are only two of many facets of history and have affected church mentality. As one views history, one will wish to see how religious and political development has changed many thoughts and ways of life in the Philippines.

In reviewing Protestant church growth and development, one will wish to include various organizations such as the Philippine Episcopal Church, the Philippine Independent Church, the IEMELIF, the Salvation Army, work of the Bible Societies, and Christian health workers. Then there is the work of the Pentecostal Church, while current organizations such as YWAM and Christian publishers will also need to be addressed.

## 4. Introduction

An effort was made to do a national church survey in the Philippines. It did not succeed. Only ten of the randomly selected 100 churches returned a total of 316 questionnaires. A separate survey among ABCCOP churches also fell short. Twelve of the thirty randomly selected churches returned a total of 488 questionnaires. After children under age fifteen were removed from the data set, 732 respondents remained.

Received data were not enough to make an analysis on the church level, which requires a minimum of thirty churches. Neither can it be said that the received questionnaires are a good representation of the church in the Philippines, because too few churches participated. The best that can be done with the data received is to present it as is, with both groups of churches (ABCCOP and the other

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<sup>5</sup> Anne C. Kwantes, *Presbyterian Missionaries in the Philippines: Conduits of social change (1899-1910)* (Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1989), 52-54. James B. Rodgers, *Forty Years in the Philippines* (New York: Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church in the USA, 1940), 163-65.

churches) combined. In some cases a distinction will be made between the ABCCOP and other churches.

## 5. Evangelicals

### 3.1. Growth

Twenty-eight percent of all respondents were not born in a Protestant or evangelical family and had become members of an evangelical church within the last ten years. This is an average yearly conversion growth rate of 3.3%, leading to a doubling of the evangelical percentage in the population in twenty-one years.

Growth is faster among the non-ABCCOP churches: 4.0% compared to 2.9%, resulting in doubling in percentage of the population in eighteen and twenty-four years respectively.

### 3.2. Sex

Sex ratio among born evangelical Christians and converts

|       | <i>Born in evangelical families %</i> | <i>Converts %</i> | <i>All respondents %</i> |
|-------|---------------------------------------|-------------------|--------------------------|
| Men   | 33.8                                  | 36.7              | 35.8                     |
| Women | 66.2                                  | 63.3              | 64.2                     |

In every country researched, a gender gap was found. The gap in the Philippines is fairly typical: 1.8 women for every man in church. It might be thought that this is because women attend church more regularly than men. But the findings do not suggest such an explanation. They do show that men are far less likely than women to be active members of an evangelical church. This is confirmed by the fact that twenty-four percent of married women say their husband is not an evangelical Christian, while only five percent of married man say their wife is not.

A more surprising outcome is that this is equally true for those born in evangelical families as for converts. So not only are women from other backgrounds twice as likely to become evangelical than are men, but at least half of all the boys born in evangelical families do not become faithful church attenders. The church in the Philippines would be wise to discover why this is and to try to improve the situation.

### 3.3. Year of birth

|                              | <i>Mean</i> |
|------------------------------|-------------|
| Born in evangelical families | 1985        |
| Converts                     | 1974        |
| All respondents              | 1977        |
| Population 15+ <sup>6</sup>  | 1982        |

The mean age of evangelicals in the Philippines is higher than that of the population in general. The mean age of converts is much higher: eight years. It is often assumed that a church with many converts is a church with many young people. The opposite is true in the Philippines. Converts come into the church later in life, thus skewing the age distribution towards older people. The more converts a church has, the older the church is likely to be.

Those born in evangelical families are slightly younger than the general population. This finding shows that, even from biological growth alone, the percentage of evangelical Christians in the population would slowly increase.

### 5.4. Level of education

Level of education: percentages

|                              | <i>Less than primary</i> | <i>Primary</i> | <i>Secondary</i> | <i>Vocational</i> | <i>Bachelor's</i> | <i>Master's or higher</i> |
|------------------------------|--------------------------|----------------|------------------|-------------------|-------------------|---------------------------|
| Born in evangelical families | 1                        | 5              | 30               | 10                | 46                | 8                         |
| Converts                     | 3                        | 8              | 31               | 14                | 37                | 8                         |
| Total                        | 2                        | 7              | 31               | 12                | 39                | 8                         |

The level of education among surveyed evangelicals is high, with forty-seven percent of all respondents having completed a university degree (forty-nine percent of those twenty-five years old or older). Among the general population twenty-five years old or older, this number is only about nineteen percent.<sup>7</sup> This difference, which is even stronger among those born in evangelical families, is big. If this same picture were true for the whole evangelical church, it would show that evangelicalism is much stronger among the educated than the less educated. The ABCCOP churches surveyed are even better educated than the other churches, with fifty-one percent versus thirty-seven percent university graduates respectively.

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<sup>6</sup> Calculated from <https://www.populationpyramid.net/philippines/2017/>

<sup>7</sup> Extrapolated from <https://www.indexmundi.com/facts/philippines/educational-attainment>

## 5.5. Ethnicity

The table below presents the answers of the respondents to the question about ethnicity. Just over half of the respondents said they are Tagalog. The other ethnic groups with a large presence in the survey are Bicolano (twenty percent), Ilocano (twelve percent), and Cebuano (five percent). This result does not say anything about the entire church in the Philippines because of the limited sample and the low return rate.

|         |             | <i>Frequency</i> | <i>Valid Percent</i> |
|---------|-------------|------------------|----------------------|
| Valid   | Asi         | 2                | ,3                   |
|         | Bicolano    | 133              | 19,9                 |
|         | Bisaya      | 23               | 3,4                  |
|         | Cebuano     | 36               | 5,4                  |
|         | Ibanag      | 1                | ,1                   |
|         | Igorot      | 1                | ,1                   |
|         | Ilocano     | 83               | 12,4                 |
|         | Ilonggo     | 10               | 1,5                  |
|         | Itawit      | 1                | ,1                   |
|         | Kapampangan | 7                | 1,0                  |
|         | Pangalatok  | 3                | ,4                   |
|         | Pangasinan  | 11               | 1,6                  |
|         | Tagalog     | 352              | 52,7                 |
|         | Waray       | 5                | ,7                   |
|         | Total       | 668              | 100,0                |
| Missing |             | 65               |                      |
| Total   |             | 733              |                      |

One very interesting finding of this research was that the percentage of minorities in the church had a strong positive correlation with conversion growth ( $r=.60$ , when weighted for attendance, which is statistically significant even with so few churches participating).

So churches with a diverse membership grow much faster than churches with an ethnically homogeneous membership – a finding that directly contradicts the teaching in older church growth literature.



### 3.6. Birth religion

What was the most important religion in the home you grew up in?

|         |                 | <i>Frequency</i> | <i>Valid Percent</i> |
|---------|-----------------|------------------|----------------------|
| Valid   | Islam           | 2                | ,3                   |
|         | Protestant      | 28               | 3,9                  |
|         | Catholic        | 485              | 67,6                 |
|         | Evangelical     | 171              | 23,8                 |
|         | Other Christian | 19               | 2,6                  |
|         | Other religion  | 11               | 1,5                  |
|         | No religion     | 1                | ,1                   |
|         | Total           | 717              | 100,0                |
| Missing | System          | 16               |                      |
| Total   |                 | 733              |                      |

The main finding here is that two-thirds of all evangelicals were born in a Catholic family. This shows the rapid growth of evangelicalism in the Philippines.

Only one person had a non-religious background. This aligns with the national census 2015, which found that fewer than 0.1% of the population claim no religion.<sup>8</sup>

### 3.7. Marriage

Fifty-six percent of respondents indicated they are married. Eighteen percent of them are married to a non-evangelical. Remarkably, only sixteen percent of converts are married to a non-evangelical, while the percentage for those born in an evangelical family is twenty-eight percent. So converts seem more likely to marry within the church than are those who grow up in the church. They are also better in influencing their spouse to become a Christian. Because of the low numbers (the twenty-eight percent are in total nineteen people in the sample), this conclusion cannot be made with certainty. But it seems likely that many evangelicals marry non-evangelicals. If so, this suggests that the church could do more to encourage members to marry fellow evangelicals.

Because women are so much more open to the Gospel than men, it is far more common for women to come to faith and have their husbands follow them than the other way around, as the table below shows.

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<sup>8</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religion\\_in\\_the\\_Philippines](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religion_in_the_Philippines)

| Who became Christian first? |                                 | Frequency | Valid Percent |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------|---------------|
| Valid                       | Husband                         | 105       | 24,5          |
|                             | Wife                            | 245       | 57,2          |
|                             | Together                        | 60        | 14,0          |
|                             | Both born in Christian families | 18        | 4,2           |
|                             | Total                           | 428       | 100,0         |
| Missing                     | System                          | 305       |               |
| Total                       |                                 | 733       |               |

However, this finding does not show that it is easier for women to lead their husband to the Lord than the other way around. On the contrary, the statistic cited above – that only five percent of men are married to a non-evangelical whereas for women the number is twenty-four percent – suggests the opposite. In any case, the statistics show that in most situations, spouses are most likely to eventually embrace evangelical Christianity together. It should be remembered that even the twenty-four percent figure is not a final number. Instead, it is likely that additional husbands will come to faith in the future.

### 3.8. Friends

How many of your five closest friends are Christian?

|         |        | Frequency | Valid Percent |
|---------|--------|-----------|---------------|
| Valid   | 0      | 57        | 9,1           |
|         | 1      | 80        | 12,8          |
|         | 2      | 100       | 16,1          |
|         | 3      | 86        | 13,8          |
|         | 4      | 56        | 9,0           |
|         | 5      | 244       | 39,2          |
|         | Total  | 623       | 100,0         |
| Missing | System | 110       |               |
| Total   |        | 733       |               |

A majority of respondents has non-Christian (by which evangelicals in the Philippines mean non-evangelical) friends. There is a not a big difference between respondents born in evangelical families and later converts.

### 3.9. Meetings

The table below shows that eighty-three percent of respondents say they attend church every week.

|         |                   | <i>Frequency</i> | <i>Valid Percent</i> |
|---------|-------------------|------------------|----------------------|
| Valid   | Every week        | 543              | 83,2                 |
|         | Every two weeks   | 48               | 7,4                  |
|         | Every month       | 41               | 6,3                  |
|         | Less than monthly | 21               | 3,2                  |
|         | Total             | 653              | 100,0                |
| Missing | System            | 80               |                      |
| Total   |                   | 733              |                      |

These answers can be corrected to show the percentages not just for the respondents, but for all evangelical Christians attending church. Those who attend every two weeks only have a fifty percent chance to be surveyed and so are weighed double for this calculation. We assumed that those who attend less than once a month attend once every two months on average. Doing so results in the following table.

Evangelical Christians church attenders, weighted for attendance

|       |                   | <i>Frequency</i> | <i>Valid Percent</i> |
|-------|-------------------|------------------|----------------------|
| Valid | Every week        | 543              | 55,9                 |
|       | Every two weeks   | 96               | 9,9                  |
|       | Every month       | 164              | 16,9                 |
|       | Less than monthly | 168              | 17,3                 |
|       | Total             | 971              | 100,0                |

This adjustment changes the picture considerably. It shows that members who claim to attend weekly are a small majority, but that a third of the members attends monthly or less. This latter figure is higher than in other countries surveyed, suggesting that the church in the Philippines could look into ways to encourage more regular attendance.

Sixty-five percent of respondents said they are part of a house group.

### 3.10. Most important in your faith

This question was open-ended. Respondents filled in the blank. Their answers were then categorized.

What is most important in your faith?

|         |                            | <i>Frequency</i> | <i>Valid Percent</i> |
|---------|----------------------------|------------------|----------------------|
| Valid   | Salvation / eternal life   | 165              | 27,1                 |
|         | God / Jesus' existence     | 214              | 35,1                 |
|         | God's help                 | 8                | 1,3                  |
|         | God makes me happy         | 5                | ,8                   |
|         | How to live your life well | 14               | 2,3                  |
|         | God loves me               | 46               | 7,6                  |
|         | Other                      | 157              | 25,8                 |
|         | Total                      | 609              | 100,0                |
| Missing | System                     | 124              |                      |
| Total   |                            | 733              |                      |

Sixty-two percent of respondents said that salvation, eternal life, God, or Jesus' existence was the most important thing in their faith. This percentage is higher than that in other countries researched, which suggests that evangelicals in the Philippines place a relatively high importance on them.

### 3.11. Theology

Percentage of right answers per statement

|   | <i>Right answer</i> | <i>ABCCOP</i> | <i>Other churches</i> |
|---|---------------------|---------------|-----------------------|
| We get saved by keeping God's law (no)                      | 51                  | 58            | 41                    |
| Jesus never sinned (yes)                                    | 95                  | 96            | 95                    |
| If you have enough faith, God will heal you (no)            | 8                   | 10            | 6                     |
| Everything the Bible teaches is true (yes)                  | 98                  | 98            | 98                    |
| If you don't believe in Christ you are eternally lost (yes) | 90                  | 91            | 88                    |

In three areas, there is agreement among at least ninety percent of the respondents on doctrines that historically have been important in Protestantism and evangelicalism: Jesus never sinned, everything the Bible teaches is true, and people who don't believe in Christ are eternally lost.

However, half affirmed that people can be saved by keeping God's law. Further research on this matter should be done. It could reveal that even mature Christians gave this answer because the prevailing belief in their communities that salvation is by works has eroded their understanding that is by grace and through faith. It could be because the teaching of the epistles with their commands and prohibitions confuses some Christians, making them think they need to obey all of them in order to maintain their salvation. Or it could be because some respondents interpreted "God's Law" to include Jesus' command to repent and believe in the Gospel.

Only eight percent of respondents denied that if your faith is strong enough, God will heal. It may sound spiritual to believe that God will certainly heal, but such a belief is based on a literal interpretation of certain passages while ignoring other important passages on the subject. Church leaders would be wise to teach the whole counsel of God on this matter.

Members in ABCCOP churches had a slightly more biblical theology than members in other churches. In the area of being 'saved by the law,' they were quite a bit better than the other churches. Still, in general, church leaders should keep this finding in mind and respond to it by regularly preaching and teaching the beautiful message that God's grace, and His grace alone, can save a person, and that a person can receive it by putting their faith in Jesus.

## 4. Conversion

### 4.1. Conversion process

How long was there between when you first heard the Gospel until you believed?

| <i>How long to conversion</i> | <i>Converts %</i> | <i>Odds of becoming Christian over time</i> |
|-------------------------------|-------------------|---|
| Less than 1 year              | 16                | 1   |
| 1 year                        | 12                |   |
| 1 year to 2 years             | 10                | 0.31  |
| 2 years to 5 years            | 17                | 0.20  |
| 5 years to 10 years           | 16                | 0.11  |
| 10 years to 20 years          | 15                | 0.05  |
| More than 20 years*           | 14                | 0.02  |

\* Odds calculated using thirty years as average

After hearing the Gospel, over a quarter of converts become Christians within a year. The same percentage become Christians after ten years or more. The actual percentage for this last group is even higher. This is because, being older when they become Christians, the chance that they will be surveyed is smaller than for people who convert much more quickly.

There is a wide variety in how long people take before becoming Christians. The first year of hearing the Gospel is really important. If people do not convert within that year, the chance that they will convert drops lower and lower each year. So, the church should persevere in following up those who

have heard the Gospel in the past year but have not yet made a decision. At the same time, the church should not lose heart but continue to share the Gospel with everyone, since almost three quarters of those who come to faith do so decades after having heard the Gospel for the first time.

#### 4.2. Age of becoming Christian

| <i>Age</i> | <i>Born in evangelical families %</i> | <i>Converts %</i> |
|------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------|
| 0          | 4                                     | 1                 |
| 1-9        | 11                                    | 7                 |
| 10-19      | 63                                    | 32                |
| 20-29      | 12                                    | 24                |
| 30-39      | 6                                     | 18                |
| 40-49      | 2                                     | 12                |
| 50-59      | 2                                     | 6                 |
| 60-69      | 0                                     | 1                 |
| 70+        | 0                                     | 1                 |
| Mean       | 16.2                                  | 26.6              |
| Median     | 14                                    | 24                |
| Mode       | 13                                    | 15                |

Among converts, the teenage years are the most common time to become an evangelical Christian. A third of converts become evangelical in that period of life, with fifteen being the most common age. In the decades after that, fewer and fewer people convert. So youth outreach is crucial in the Philippines. This conclusion might seem obvious, but in most other Asian countries, the percentage that convert as teenager is significantly lower.

Of course it should be realized that the table above somewhat overstates the case. If you convert at fifteen and go to church until seventy-five, you have sixty church-attending years; whereas if you convert at sixty-five, you only have ten church-attending years. So the actual percentage of people converting at older ages is always higher than this kind of survey suggests. This point is made clear when only recent converts (since 2015) are taken into account. While the most common age to convert is still low (fourteen), the median rises to twenty-eight (meaning that fifty percent of converts are older than twenty-eight), and the average rises to thirty-two.

The teenage years are even more important for those who grow up in evangelical families. Remarkably, only four percent say they have been Christian from birth. So there is an almost universal understanding among evangelicals in the Philippines that you become a Christian by being born again, not by being born into a certain kind of family. Almost two-thirds say they came to faith during their teenage years, with thirteen being the most common age. Only eleven percent mention

an age between one and nine. This finding might indicate that Filipino parents could do better in raising their children in the faith.

#### 4.3. Who had the most influence in you becoming a Christian?

|                   | <i>Born in evangelical families %</i> | <i>Converts %</i> |
|-------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------|
| Father            | 8,3                                   | 2,8               |
| Mother            | 26,9                                  | 9,1               |
| Father and mother | 22,8                                  | 5,6               |
| My child          | 1,0                                   | 2,8               |
| Spouse            | ,5                                    | 10,3              |
| Other relative    | 7,8                                   | 10,9              |
| Friend            | 4,1                                   | 12,5              |
| Pastor            | 14,5                                  | 23,4              |
| Church worker     | 10,4                                  | 12,1              |
| Foreign Christian | 2,1                                   | 4,4               |
| Other             | 1,6                                   | 6,2               |

For those born in evangelical families, fifty-eight percent mention their parents as being the most influential in their becoming Christian. Twenty-five percent mention a pastor or church worker. Among converts, relatives and family are the most important influence (forty-two percent), but pastors and church workers follow closely behind (thirty-five percent). So the church seems to grow in two main ways: 1) Christian pastors make inroads among new communities; and 2) from there, the Gospel mainly spreads among relatives, supported by Christian pastors. Friends and other contacts are far less important than these two main ways the Gospel is spreading.

#### 4.4. What medium had an influence in your becoming a Christian?

|          | <i>Born in evangelical Christian families %</i> | <i>Converts %</i> |
|----------|---|-------------------|
| Internet | 1,5   | 1,0               |
| Bible    | 89,3  | 86,9              |
| TV       | ,5  | 1,6               |
| Book     | ,5  | 1,0               |
| Video    | ,5  | ,8                |
| Tract    | 3,6   | 3,1               |
| Radio    | 3,0   | 2,7               |
| None     | ,0  | 2,9               |

The main finding from the media question is the power of God's Word. More than anything else, the Bible is the medium that draws people to God. It can be argued that the Bible is different from the other media in the list, since it is more likely to be read after people have heard the Gospel through other media. However, it was not possible to factor this out, for when in earlier research 'Bible' was not listed as an option, the percentage for 'book' grew dramatically.

Compared to the Bible, other media do not play a significant role in people becoming Christian. Though in every country researched the Bible was mentioned most often, it was typically around fifty percent. So the church in the Philippines is very Bible-centric.

#### 4.5. Experience

What was the most important for you in coming to faith?

|   | <i>Born in evangelical Christians families %</i> | <i>Converts %</i> |
|---|--|-------------------|
| A healing                                 | 0.5  | 3.3               |
| Other miracle                             | 0.5  | 1                 |
| A dream                                   | 0.5  | 1.2               |
| <b>Total God's direct intervention</b>    | <b>1.5</b>                                       | <b>5.5</b>        |
| Studying the Bible                        | 54.7   | 54.5              |
| Someone shared the Gospel with me         | 13.6   | 12.6              |
| <b>Total Gospel content</b>               | <b>68.3</b>                                      | <b>67.1</b>       |
| The love I saw in the lives of Christians | 16.8   | 16.6              |
| <b>Total love</b>                         | <b>16.8</b>                                      | <b>16.6</b>       |



|                              |             |             |
|------------------------------|-------------|-------------|
| A house group meeting        | 4.2         | 3.3         |
| Sermon in church             | 3.7         | 3.9         |
| Worship in church            | 5.3         | 2.5         |
| Mass meeting                 | 0           | 1           |
| <b>Total church meetings</b> | <b>13.2</b> | <b>10.7</b> |

Both among converts and among those born in evangelical families, studying the Bible is by far the most important experience in coming to faith, with fifty-five percent giving this answer. This number is somewhat inflated, since it is even higher among the over-represented ABCCOP churches (fifty-nine percent) than among the other churches (forty-nine percent). Yet even in the other churches, this percentage is much higher than in any of the other Asian countries researched. Typically, the four categories are pretty evenly distributed, with God's direct intervention often having the highest percentage. So this finding affirms what was found above, that the Bible plays a central role in the church in the Philippines. Filipino Christians do not claim to experience God's direct intervention as often as other Asian Christians, yet the church has a healthy growth rate.

#### 4.6. Motivation

What motivated you to become a Christian?\*

|  | <i>Born in evangelical Christians families %</i> | <i>Converts %</i> |
|--|--|-------------------|
| To know the truth                            | 52   | 59                |
| To go to heaven                              | 40   | 44                |
| To get healing                               | 4  | 4                 |
| To get God's help in my life                 | 47   | 50                |
| To get forgiveness of sins                   | 37   | 29                |
| To get freedom from fear of spirits          | 2  | 2                 |
| To get removal of shame                      | 1  | 1                 |
| To be part of a loving church                | 12   | 12                |
| To be accepted by a Christian person / group | 2  | 0                 |
| Other  | 0  | 0                 |
| None   | 0  | 0                 |
| Total  | 195  | 200               |

\* Up to three answers per respondent

From a list of ten possible motivations for becoming a Christian, respondents could choose up to three. The highest scoring items, each selected by forty to sixty percent of respondents, were

‘knowing the truth’, ‘to get God’s help in my life’, and ‘going to heaven’. It would be helpful if future research sought to better discover what they mean by God’s help.

Motivations for those born in evangelical families and for converts were roughly the same. There was one significant difference: converts mentioned ‘knowing the truth’ more often and ‘getting forgiveness of sins’ less often.

The average respondent picked two motivations which confirms the general observation that human motivations are not singular and simple. We are finding that the same is true for the motivations which compel people to become a Christian.

#### 4.7. Group influence

Conversion happens both individually and in groups. A slight majority of fifty-four percent of converts said they became a Christian alone. Thirty percent did so as part of a group of five people or less; ten percent, as part of a group of six to ten people; and six percent, as part of a group larger than ten people.

#### 4.8. Personal evangelism

How many people have you told about Jesus in the last month?

| <i>Number of people</i> | <i>All %</i> |
|-------------------------|--------------|
| 0                       | 40*          |
| 1-5                     | 42           |
| 6-10                    | 9            |
| 11+                     | 9            |

\* This includes a twenty percent non-response. Because non-response was very low in other questions, it was assumed that ‘no answer’ meant ‘no evangelism’.

Over half of Filipino Christians actively share their faith. On average, they do so with five people a month. Using this figure and others from this study suggests that it takes an average of 1,855 evangelistic conversations to add one member to a church. This number is several times higher than the number found in areas with very fast church growth such as northern Vietnam and Mongolia. This high number could be due to Filipino evangelicals’ tendency to speak often and openly about their faith. They do it while traveling, with strangers, and in other situations where there is no chance that the person they are sharing with would become a member of their church. The high number could also be related to this research’s finding that forty-five percent of converts come to faith five or more years after first hearing the Gospel. It could be that many of these people needed to hear about Jesus multiple times before they put their faith in Him.

Evangelism is hard and usually does not lead to instant results. The openness to the Gospel on Java is less than in any other country studied in this research project so far. For example, in northern

Vietnam and Mongolia, around 400 and 600 conversations respectively lead to one new church member. Interestingly, it is also higher than the number of conversations needed in Japan. That the church in the Philippines is still growing rather fast is not just a result of spiritual openness in the country. More than anything else, it is a result of active evangelism. Filipino Christians share their faith more often than the Christians in any other country studied in this research project.

## 5. Churches in the Philippines

In twenty-one churches, a leader's questionnaire was completed. This number is too low to analyze statistically. Thirteen of these churches are ABCCOP; nine belong to other denominations. Therefore, they do not represent the church in the Philippines as a whole. The results of the survey are presented below. Further research would be needed to determine whether the picture that arises from these findings is the same for the entire church.

### 5.1. Age of churches

The age distribution of the churches in the survey is as follows:

| <i>Year of foundation</i> | <i>Number of churches in survey</i> |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1960s                     | 2                                   |
| 1970s                     | 0                                   |
| 1980s                     | 6                                   |
| 1990s                     | 7                                   |
| 2000s                     | 4                                   |
| 2010s                     | 1                                   |

N=100

### 5.2. Size of churches

The average size of the churches in the survey is 103 members. The average attendance is seventy-two, with a range from fifteen to 300. The median attendance is forty-five. These attendance numbers are about the same as in other countries. The attendance rate among the members is seventy percent.

### 5.3. Church planters

|        | <i>Number of churches</i> |
|--------|---------------------------|
| Pastor | 5                         |

|                    |   |
|--------------------|---|
| Foreign missionary | 6 |
| Group of believers | 7 |
| Other              | 0 |

A remarkably high number of churches were planted by foreign missionaries. This finding can be easily explained. The research project aimed to study one hundred randomly selected churches and thirty churches that are related to a certain mission organization. Research was completed on a much higher percentage of the target for those churches than of the randomly selected ones. It would be helpful for future research to ask a similar question about a much larger number of churches in the country

#### 5.4. Home groups

All churches indicated they have home groups, showing that home groups are a normal part of church life for virtually every church in the Philippines. In the church member's survey, sixty-five percent of the church attenders claim to be part of a house group. However, in the church leaders' survey, the numbers add up to only thirty-eight percent. Without further research, it is hard to know whether the leaders' estimates are too low or that too many church members claim to belong to a home group. It could be that sixty-five percent see themselves as members of a home group, whereas thirty-eight percent is the average actual attendance. If that is the case, more could be done to increase the real participation rate in home groups.

#### 5.5. Baptism

Average time from conversion to baptism

|                  | <i>Number of churches</i> |
|------------------|---------------------------|
| Less than a year | 14                        |
| One year         | 8                         |
| Over one year    | 0                         |

The most typical time from conversion to baptism is seven to eight months. Further research might reveal that those with a longer wait time hold a baptism only when a certain number of people are ready to be baptized and that some churches, being located far from a body of water, can only afford to hold a baptism once a year.

#### 5.6. Leader training

| <i>Number of members trained as leaders</i> | <i>Percentage of churches</i> |
|---|-------------------------------|
|---|-------------------------------|

|      |   |
|------|---|
| 0    | 6 |
| 3-5  | 3 |
| 6-10 | 6 |
| 11+  | 6 |

Most churches have leader training of some sort. Clearly, this activity is not done as one-on-one mentoring. Instead, small groups in the church receive leadership training.

### 5.8. Theology and traditions

|                               | <i>Yes</i> | <i>No</i> |
|-------------------------------|------------|-----------|
| Infant baptism                | 1          | 19        |
| Speaking in tongues in church | 8          | 12        |
| Women on church board         | 18         | 1         |
| Women preaching               | 16         | 3         |

|                          | <i>Always</i> | <i>Often</i> | <i>Sometimes</i> | <i>Never</i> |
|--------------------------|---------------|--------------|------------------|--------------|
| Sermon in church service | 19            | 0            | 0                | 0            |

|               | <i>Weekly</i> | <i>Monthly</i> | <i>Every 3 months</i> | <i>Yearly or less</i> |
|---------------|---------------|----------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Lord's Supper | 0             | 19             | 0                     | 0                     |

|                    | <i>Organ / piano</i> | <i>Band</i> | <i>Local Instruments</i> | <i>No instruments</i> |
|--------------------|----------------------|-------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| Musical instrument | 3                    | 16          | 0                        | 0                     |

Women in ministry is almost universally accepted. Church services always include a sermon. Celebrating the Lord's Supper happens monthly in all churches. Almost all churches use a band in congregational worship.

Infant baptism is very rare. Speaking in tongues is practiced in a large minority of the churches. Most ABCCOP churches do not have speaking in tongues whereas most of the other churches do.

### 5.9. Organization

| <i>Church plant initiated by</i> | <i>Number of churches</i> |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------|
|----------------------------------|---------------------------|

|              |   |
|--------------|---|
| Denomination | 3 |
| Mission      | 6 |
| Local church | 6 |
| Individuals  | 4 |

Interestingly, only a small proportion of churches are planted through personal initiative. In most examples of rapid church growth, personal initiative plays a major role. For continued growth in the Philippines, more church members should be equipped and released to go and plant churches

| <i>Leadership structure</i>  | <i>Number of churches</i> |
|------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Only members, no leaders     | 0                         |
| Leaders but no pastor        | 0                         |
| Pastor submits to board      | 10                        |
| Board submits to pastor      | 6                         |
| Only pastor                  | 1                         |
| Pastor who submits to bishop | 1                         |

Most churches have both a board and a pastor. In most cases, the board is over the pastor. Nevertheless, the opposite structure is common as well.

The churches in the Philippines are well-staffed, as the table below shows.

| <i>Number of full-time staff</i> | <i>Number of churches</i> |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------|
| 0                                | 1                         |
| 1                                | 6                         |
| 2+                               | 11                        |

Almost all churches in the Philippines that were surveyed have at least one full-time staff. The churches answering this question have 1,355 worshipers between them, and fifty-five pastoral staff members, which is one staff member for every twenty-five worshipers. Although high, this ratio is comparable to that in the other Asian countries studied in this research project.

#### **5.10. Church ministry**

|                 | <i>Number of churches with separate budget available</i> | <i>Average % of budget (including churches without budget)</i> |
|-----------------|--|--|
| Social work     | 15   | 6  |
| Evangelism      | 16   | 12   |
| Church planting | 12   | 7  |
| Missions        | 5  | 1  |

N=21

Most churches have a budget for social work and evangelism. Half have a budget for church planting, and a quarter for missions. The budget for evangelism is twice as high as for social work, showing what their priority is.

| <i>Does your church send out:</i>                 | <i>Number of churches</i> |
|---|---------------------------|
| Church planters to those of your own ethnicity    | 12                        |
| Cross-cultural church planters in the Philippines | 3                         |
| Church planters abroad                            | 3                         |
| <i>Any church planter</i>                         | <i>12</i>                 |

Half of all churches send out church planters, almost all within the Philippines.

### 5.11. Building

| <i>Meeting place</i>      | <i>Number of churches</i> |
|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| House or apartment        | 2                         |
| Part-time rented facility | 0                         |
| Rented facility           | 0                         |
| Owned facility            | 16                        |

Almost all churches surveyed meet in facilities that they own. Two meet in a house. Remarkably, none reported meeting in a rented facility. This response could be because of the difficulty that some evangelical groups face in renting a meeting place owned by a member of another religion. In certain parts of the country, doing so is very difficult.

### 5.12. Ministry time in hours per week

|        | <i>Full-time pastors (N=10)</i> | <i>Unpaid church leaders (N=7)</i> |
|--------|---------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Range  | 3-122                           | 9-61                               |
| Mean   | 38                              | 27                                 |
| Median | 28                              | 24                                 |

The answers to the questions about time spent in ministry immediately reveal a drawback of written questionnaires. Both the claimed total of three ministry hours per week and 122 ministry hours per week for a full-time pastor are extremely unlikely.

Yet two tentative conclusions may be reached: 1) many full-time pastors have trouble filling their work week with meaningful ministry, since half of them serve less than twenty-eight hours a week. This pattern was found in all countries surveyed. 2) Unpaid church leaders spend a lot of time in ministry, hardly less than salaried pastors. Whether this pattern would hold true in a larger survey, and if so, whether the reason is that they do not need the income or they work very long hours would be a good subject for follow-up research.

The time spent in ministry is divided as follows:

|                                | <i>Number of leaders doing this ministry (N=18)</i> | <i>Average hours/week (including those who do 0 hrs.)</i> | <i>Median hours/week (including those who do 0 hrs.)</i> |
|--------------------------------|---|---|--|
| Prayer                         | 18  | 6   | 3  |
| Pastoral care                  | 17  | 10  | 5  |
| Evangelism                     | 16  | 5   | 3  |
| Church service and preparation | 15  | 7   | 7  |
| Leading house groups           | 15  | 3   | 3.5  |
| Training church members        | 16  | 3   | 3  |

Most pastors are doing a little bit of every activity. They do not seem to have one main activity or focus. Several pastors spend a significant amount of time doing pastoral care.